

diploma in archive administration and paleography before I went up to St. Andrews to do research, so the year after I graduated, so I did have that. But Fran and possibly Marion I think may have gone into the library to the archives and spoken to John Davis about what they would need and what would happen and how you got things catalogued, and I think he might've suggested me. I put in an application to Banner and I think they did have more than one application. I went for an interview and they gave me the job. I had never come upon anything like, I'd never worked with sound archives at all at that point so it was all completely new to me, so there was a lot to learn. Just from the archivist point of view there was an awful lot to learn. Banner had listening equipment and headphones, so that was alright, but there wasn't really a lot of money to spend on any packaging or anything like that. However, with obviously some help from the Society of Archivists and reading about sound archives and what to do, I kind of got started. The job lasted for a year and then I worked for a bit longer while I was unemployed until I got a job in 1984 at the central library in the archives department for someone's maternity leave. In that time Banner was then on Lozells Road, so that was an interesting period, riots and things like that. Basically I sat at a desk with my headphones on while everyone else kind of worked in the office. There was rehearsal space at the back. Do you remember Lozells Road? So there was that kind of long bit that had been a bar or something at the back. So there was a lot of coming and going, meetings and all sorts of things, but the aim was that I should go through and listen to all the cassettes and summarise what was on each one and put them in some order. So I gave them all a number, put them in chronological order, kept all the different projects together, and created a kind of card index. That's what it was in those days, long before computers. So that was a complete revelation to me. I had not come from a particularly political background, I was more of a kind of, I certainly hadn't belonged to a political party, nor had my parents. My mother was Conservative and I just didn't like most of the things that they seemed to be doing. My father was a Liberal and wasn't particularly bothered. When I got to university I joined C&D and Friends of the Earth, so I was kind of on the green edge of politics as it were. I did do some things while I was up in Scotland, like campaign against uranium mining in Thorney or somewhere, which completely bemused most of the people in the village who I was trying to get to sign this petition. I think they thought I was just a mad student. Chris was Labour and his father worked for Lucas or whatever they were before Lucas and aerospace took the factory over on the Stafford Road for over 40 years.

He'd always campaigned for the Labour party and done election visits and things like that, a lifelong union man. So I'd kind of heard slightly different things meeting with Chris's parents and being with him. Listening to the recordings that Banner had made of people was just a revelation really. I'd never heard people talk about their working life like that. Apart from Chris's dad and the three-day week while I was growing up in the '70s and having to do without electricity and things like that, I'd never really, because I'd always lived on the edge of county towns or in the country, I had no real experience of industrial politics or industrial working life really. Coming to Birmingham was a complete change. As I say, I'd never heard people talk about their work in the same way. So to hear about, I'm trying to think what the first project I would've listened to. . .

Q: Remind me of the year again.

FT: I started with Banner in '82.. . . Possibly I think Housing Game and Dr. Healey's Casebook were probably...

Q: Then the Great Divide was before that.

FT: I don't think there were any tapes for The Great Divide. I think it was probably either The Housing Game or On the Brink that I kind of started off with. It transformed my life really, partly because I became interested in sound archives and had all those projects. But it also introduced me to a kind of political network of people like the trade unionists centre and people there. So I went on, even after I'd left and stopped working for Banner, I went on to do other things like the Birmingham people's history group and the small joint publication on the city centenary, the city of 1989. I suppose I knew more about feminism, sexism, than probably other things, because I'd done quite a lot of reading while I was at uni and been at campaigns about the abortion bill and things like that. One of the things I did in Birmingham was a course on race relations, which was at the BMI, because obviously that was a very and still is really a lively issue at the time. It was good to actually try and understand it a bit more, and working with Banner raised all sorts of issues in both the work they were doing and on the tapes really.

Q: What happened to the tapes once you catalogued them?

FT: We did get some boxes and they got put in boxes and they were stored in a very large cupboard that was built into the wall in the office. *When the office was fire bombed in 1990, luckily they didn't get too damaged. A bit of smoke damage and some of the slides melted I think, but the tapes were generally okay. At that point obviously the office was not going to be usable again, so Banner was going to have to move elsewhere. I managed to negotiate with the then principal archivist, who was no longer John Davis, that Banner's archive of tapes, slides and anything else they wanted to deposit at the time could be temporarily lodged in the central library and the Archives would look after it until Banner decided where it was then going to go. This was a kind of emergency thing. In the end, Banner decided to leave them there, and they were properly deposited. But initially that was a kind of rescue just to save what was a very important archive.* The Charles Parker archive, which was altogether much larger but obviously connected to Banner, had come into the library in 1986 I think, so in that sense the fact that there was this other archive of a theatre company that Parker had worked with and helped to set up once he left the BBC was seen as a good match. *In the late '80s there was quite a strong left wing leaning staff in the archives in the library. I think it was seen as important that records of groups or individuals who represented labour history were saved. So often, things like that had not been saved. In fact, there was a huge political trade union archive but it was actually stored in Social Sciences because the head of Social Sciences had been on all sorts of committees and was quite left wing and made sure that all these trade union things and labour Conservative party records and what not came into the library. But there hadn't been a great deal of collecting; archives had only been set up as a separate department, separate from the local studies library in 1980.* The archivist, John Davis, was brand new as it were to the library and for the first time it was actually being run as a separate department rather than as part of local studies. So in that sense there was more opportunity to collect records which hadn't really come into the library for some years. I think there'd been a lot of collecting maybe up to the Second World War and then it had fallen off slightly. We were also more interested in social history; that was becoming much more of a focus in higher education as well. *I can remember being utterly shocked that there was no, I mean in the subject card index in the archives there was nothing under women, not even a single entry for women, that women had not until that*

point been considered a separate subject or a possible separate subject. So one of the things I did start in the Archives was indexing things for women and for I think communities, which again had never been done before. So that was where my whole kind of black history interest started really. It was important for me that Banner's archive was saved and looked after properly, and still is.

Q: You had the tapes, did they have transcripts?

FT: It would depend who had been writing the script for the show and how much time they had and I suppose how much money they'd managed to raise for any one performance. There were some transcripts. If you look at Charles Parker's archive from the BBC, most things were transcribed, but the BBC had lots of secretarial help. Obviously, that didn't carry on after Banner theatre started. Occasionally some things would be transcribed but not everything, no. What I was doing in a year, there were nearly a thousand cassettes at that point and I think I got through 960 something, the last one I numbered anyway. It wasn't possible to transcribe them; you know how long it takes to transcribe an interview. I was just summarising, so I'd got index cards which folded up about that long so I could use both sides of that, and it folded up into the cassette case. It's all probably very subjective, because it's what I heard basically.

Q: Were the tapes ever used again by the company?

FT: Yes, that was part of the problem really. Material was always reused, particularly if... Many of those early Banner shows were focusing on a specific trade union or a specific subject, like housing, health, the steel strike. But life isn't that compartmentalised, so you could, depending what the people you interviewed told you, there might well be other issues that came up which could be used in other shows or weren't just relevant to The Housing Game or something. So in that sense, yes. As with the slides, slides could be used for all sorts of different things. So yes, things would be used, and obviously if there was some sort of index, even an index of people and subjects I think I created to help, then it was going to be helpful hopefully to the company.

Q: In what way was it a problem?

FT: My experience of working with theatrical people is just that life is so busy and everything's being done at the last minute in a hurry, and things just don't get put away again. It was fine while I was there because I could find things and put them away, but that doesn't always happen and then they get lost. As someone who was striving to keep an order in something, I was going to get upset if Tape #60 hadn't returned. But once I wasn't there anymore, then obviously if there isn't someone keeping an eye on that, then things get lost.

Q: By the time they all got deposited in the library, were they all there?

FT: I think most of them were; there were a few missing. I think most of them were there. Then new technology changed and cassettes were no longer being used in the same way. Technology moves on and other things get used instead.

Q: Were the slides also catalogued?

FT: No, I didn't have time to do that. Pete had started to catalogue them and there was a system at least to have them, I'm trying to remember. I think generally they were all stored in those page pockets which you could put in filing cabinets. They were arranged by show really, but again they would walk even faster than tapes would. Banner was never just doing one show, there was always a song group and there were amateur groups and then there were the professional core as well, so there were always several things on the go at once, not to mention just benefit nights and things like that. It was a very active company in the '80s.

Q: How many people were around?

FT: The main group I suppose was Marion Pike was their administrator, Fran, Pete, Dave, Chris were the main workers as it were, and there was someone called Steve who was project coordinator of the Handsworth group. Then there were the amateur groups as well,

so Jan ? were doing an employment show. I think and the women's group was still active so there were people like Marion and Naomi, Joy, Doreen. Then there was the committee management so that was John Fryer as well and I think Marion was on it for a while. There were lots of people, depending when there were rehearsals and things like that.

Q: What happened to the archive when it was transferred to the library? It was supposed to be temporary to begin with?

FT: To begin with it was supposed to be there for five years. By that point Banner had moved premises about three times I think. Money, as usual, was a, lack of money, as usual, was an issue. The company seemed to be going into one of its periodic nosedives at that point. I think they just basically carried on creating new material for the shows they had, so what was in the library was occasionally, sometimes a few would be borrowed back, but not a great deal actually. The slides had been severely smoke damaged and although there were several mentions by various people that they'd come in and sort them and throw away ones which they didn't want to keep, it never actually happened. So they're still as they were.

Q: Who made the decision to start going through the tapes and digitising them?

FT: The big cataloguing project which included Banner archive was the Connecting Histories project. Part of the Charles Parker archive had been catalogued with the assistance of money from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Future for Ordinary Folk project. That was partly because there were always a lot of issues over BBC's copyrights and getting permission from the BBC to do anything with the actual sound recordings in the Charles Parker archive. So it was decided to start with the recordings that weren't BBC, which were mostly folk music related – things like the Birmingham Midland Folk Centre tapes and all sorts of other things that Charles Parker had done, and the critics group ones and Festival at Falls and all that sort of thing that Charles Parker had been involved in before Banner. So they were catalogued and digitised as I think it was a two year project with a project archivist. Because she actually left to become a teacher and because of when the project started and when she had to start her studies, I ended up doing the last six months of that project standing in there. However, it as recognised that there was still two thirds of the

Charles Parker archive that required digitising, so with help from again Heritage Lottery money, a really big project called Connecting Histories was applied for and the money was got for that along with money from elsewhere. That was going to take several large political archives. I think there were three or four archivists, two BME trainee archivists because it had been recognised that there were abysmally few archivists who are from black and ethnic communities. So that was quite a ground-breaking bit. The archives that were chosen were the records of the Hebrew congregation in Birmingham which had come in, the Charles Parker archive, Fanny Burk's photographic collections, and I can't remember now. They were also going to be digital learning packages and all sorts of outreach work and getting volunteers in to help package material and things like that. Banner's archive was included as part of that, so that was how it got properly catalogued and the tapes digitised. No actually, sorry, the Banner tapes hadn't been digitised, it was just the paperwork that got.

Q: That'll be another big project at some point.

FT: There are issues with that because for most of Banner's recordings there are no clearance forms. Even if you could digitise them for preservation purposes, you wouldn't be able to use them.

Q: Do you know when they started using consent forms?

FT: Dean probably knows that more than me.

Dean: I think we used them in the '90s.

FT: I did try, I have to say I did try, because it was an issue on every oral history project. But trying to get things actually done is not always easy.

Q: After your year and a half with Banner you got the library job. Did you keep in touch with the company?

FT: Yes, because I'd had my arm twisted into joining a committee management by that point. I liked the work that Banner was doing, I was interested, and it was good to keep an eye on the company. So yes I would turn up periodically for management meetings, which were more frequent than they are at the moment; they were monthly I think. And I'd go to performances and things like that.

Q: What did you think of Banner's use of actuality?

FT: It was a completely different way of working, one I could imagine didn't very often happen in theatres. Not only were people's own words used as part of the script, the scripts were not fictional. I preferred the ones where they actually used people's words and also created songs out of people's words. I was less keen on the sort of more farcical scatological sort of stuff, but then I always have been, although I knew there was quite a strong element of that in the agitprop type theatre. I preferred those with more of a story, like the steel strike one, which I think worked really well. The motor trade one was a bit too much like, it was a bit sort of, I liked the setup but I didn't like the kind of farcical bits really, and sending people up. I did like the use of music, in fact I loved that. I was a sort of music person. I've always like folk music and I really liked the use of music as part of the performance and song as part of the performance. It just gave the whole thing something extra I thought. It was really interesting to see that Banner would do a performance and then would ask the audience to comment on what they'd seen, whether it worked, whether there were things that they should've included and had left out and things like that. I thought that was quite amazing really, to ask an audience for its feedback and then possibly change the performance again as a result of that. There were quite a lot of cassettes which was a post-performance recording of what the audiences were asking or talking about.

Q: They have quite a formal way now of getting feedback from the audience.

FT: I don't think they did it as a preparation for a show, but after the performances then audiences would be asked.

Q: Can you remember any changes that were suggested by the audience?

FT: No, I can't remember, sorry.

Q: Do you still go to the shows now?

FT: I don't seem to have been to anything for ages, but yes I did try. I suppose the other thing is Banner has actually done more work outside of Birmingham. At one time virtually everything was in Birmingham, even the steel strike, although it was all recorded in Colby. I know there were lots of performances in Colby but there was still... At one time also Banner used to video all its performances. I do actually remember I think I saw the steel strike one on video when Fran and Marion lived on the Stratford Rd; I think I went there to see that. What was the first live performance I saw there? I don't know, lots of people's march for job things going on.

Q: And of course there was the miners' strike.

FT: Ya but I must've seen something before that.

Q: The women's group?

FT: It probably was the women's group, yes.

Q: Do you have any memories of it?

FT: Women's group things, they were just rousing weren't they? It as great to feel that solidarity of women. It's the usual things really and frustrating they have to point all these things out to men because they don't get it, certainly at that time anyway. But also the sort of solidarity that women can stand together and do things.

Q: You mentioned the riots. Were you actually there in the office at the time?

FT: No, because it was open night mostly. I can't remember whether I couldn't get to work the next day. I do remember sort of walking along Lozells road and being appalled at the destruction. Luckily I don't remember any damage to the property that Banner and all those other organisations were in.

Q: How did the company respond to that?

FT: I can't remember. I imagine somebody went out with a tape recorder to try and find people involved. But I can't actually remember.

Q: Was the Handsworth project in full flow?

FT: Yes it was. It didn't meet at the office, it met I think at a community centre. Chris was I think doing music and in fact the Handsworth group did a show on unemployment, which I saw. Then there were various issues with Steve, which I won't go into, and then Banner employed, I can't remember his name.

Q: Milton?

FT: Milton, yes. Then there seemed to be problems over choice of music and it went a bit pear shaped I think. I never quite understood what the issues were, but I probably wasn't there enough by then.

Q: What was it like working in the office?

FT: Luckily I had a set of headphones on.

Q: What was that like?

FT: It was quite weird. You spend six hours of the day with headphones on and you're transported into other people's worlds while trying to ignore all the coming and going. I usually arrived earlier than other people just because it was two bus journeys and could

take anything from, I think the quickest I ever did it was 35 minutes, the longest was well over an hour. I would arrive and there would always be a huge pile of washing up to do, so every morning I started by washing up all the mugs. I had to buy the milk on the way as well, because there was never any milk. But that's fine.

Q: What were they like to work with?

FT: Great. Marion particularly I probably saw most of, because that's the administrator. She was in the office more than other people. She was wonderful, I really liked Marion. We got on really well. It was just fascinating. I suppose I'd never worked in an organisation where politics was such a, or where the principles of politics was so important, that idea that you must have an equal number of women members and male members, that you must consciously choose who you employ and things like that, so that it wasn't seen as either racist or sexist. And just the fact that the politics informed everything, from the way you did things to the songs you wrote and everything else really. It was really interesting. But then it was, apart from the 1851 census, this was my first job really. I'd done casual work when I was a teenager, but living in the country as I did, that was all agricultural work like daffodil picking and potato lifting and picking strawberries and things like that. I'd worked briefly one Christmas as a cook and washer up in a restaurant, but I hadn't really done any professional work before that. So it was my interesting first job.

Q: And you're still here.

FT: Well that's partly because I didn't leave Birmingham and things kept cropping up. I did at least five different maternity leaves before I got a permanent job at the library. It was all very temporary really.

Q: I get the impression that you feel it's worth preserving the Banner archives.

FT: Oh absolutely, yes.

Q: What would it take, bearing in mind that we don't have all the consent forms for the early tapes?

FT: That's the problem with the sound archive, yes. There is no way that you can reuse it or even allow people to listen to it. It's not just because what people say on the tapes might, there's so many issues of data that are protection involved, because it's all about politics, which is one of the main issues of data protection. Without getting people's permission to allow the general public to listen to those, these were recordings made for a specific show by a group of theatre workers or singers and they had the permission of whoever they were interviewing to record them for that show, but not for the general public to listen to them. So without being able to sort that out, it's just really difficult. There was at one time a possible thought that there were still enough of the people who had been interviewed still alive and could be contacted. But that kind of just never really got off the ground to try and contact people to ask if they would allow the recording to be digitised and made available.

Q: We need to discuss that with Don Bouzek, because Banner has ambitions about the archive. . . . It might be that the later decade might have those consent forms.

FT: I hope so. I thought that from about Pig's Pudding onwards they were used.

Q: Then the second big job is about collecting all the stuff that's been recorded since, which sits in Dave's attic somewhere. If all of that could be properly processed and made accessible, that would be great. The ambition is to do that with Heritage help, but it would be good to revisit all that. I think the ideas they had in terms of what kind of project would best benefit this aim of honouring the archives might not be the most appropriate ones, given what you just said, for the early parts. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss today?

FT: My head is completely blank when you ask me things like that.

[END]